

House Approves Nadler Amendment to Increase Section 8 Funding

Thursday, 24 July 2003

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) successfully offered an amendment to the Veterans Affairs/Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2004 that would increase funding for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. The House approved the measure by a vote of 217-208.

"Every American deserves to live in safe, decent, affordable housing. Section 8 vouchers give parents more of a say in what schools their children attend and more of an opportunity to live closer to their place of employment and public transportation. This program is good for families and we must do all we can to ensure its continued success for those who need it," said Nadler.

Nadler's amendment restores \$150 million in funding for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, which helps families receive subsidized rental housing in the private market. The Nadler amendment will enable an additional 23,000 families to find homes they could otherwise not afford.

Congressman Nadler's floor statement on the amendment is as follows:

Mr. Chairman, this amendment would increase funding for Section 8 housing vouchers by \$150 million to help low-income families afford safe, decent housing. To offset this increase, the amendment cuts the working capital fund from the management and administration account.

The need for housing assistance is staggering. As of January 1, 2003, the New York City Housing Authority had 141,837 applicants on its Section 8 waiting list. And it gets worse. The Section 8 waiting list has been closed to new applicants since December 1994. That is just in New York City.

In 1999, a HUD study concluded that there were nearly 5 million low-income families who paid more than 50% of their income for rent or who lived in severely substandard housing. In the last several years housing prices have continued to skyrocket, and with the stagnant economy and rising unemployment rates the problem is probably even more severe today. We must not ignore the desperate situation facing these families any longer.

I challenge anyone to argue that tenant-based Section 8 vouchers do not achieve their goals. More than two million American families benefit from Section 8 vouchers. For these families, Section 8 is more than a contract or a subsidy; it is often the foundation upon which they can build lifelong economic self-sufficiency. Section 8 allows families to enter the private housing market.

Research supports the benefits of Section 8 housing. Section 8 children are much less likely to be involved in violent crime, and they are more likely to stay in school and improve their educational performance. Section 8 families are more than twice as likely to leave welfare, and have success moving into the workforce. Based on these and other findings, the bipartisan, Congressionally-chartered Millennial Housing Commission strongly endorsed the voucher program in its May 2002 report, describing the program as "flexible, cost-effective, and successful in its mission."

So why are we planning to undermine the program in this bill?

The bill, in its current form, does a terrible disservice to those most in need. It would contribute to the growing backlog of families who can't afford decent, safe and sanitary housing.

I want to quote from a letter from religious organizations who write that "Recent analyses performed independently by the Congressional Budget Office and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) suggest that the Committee's estimate is based on voucher cost assumptions that are too low. ... CBPP estimates that the Section 8 appropriation ...is approximately \$580 million short of the funding that will be needed to fully renew vouchers leased in 2004." That means that 85,000 households will be affected.

Our amendment will allow about 23,500 more families to live in safe, affordable, decent housing. It is not asking for much. We can and should do more. But today, we only ask for a very modest amount.

We must house our people. Please vote yes on the Nadler/Velazquez Amendment. Thank you.

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